



UNIVERSITY OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

This is a peer-reviewed, post-print (final draft post-refereeing) version of the following published document and is licensed under Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 license:

Hutchinson, Mark A ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1413-6382> (2024) Book Review: The hybrid reformation: a social, cultural, and intellectual history of contending forces. *History of European Ideas*, 50 (3). pp. 557-560. doi:10.1080/01916599.2023.2275000

Official URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01916599.2023.2275000>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2023.2275000>

EPrint URI: <https://eprints.glos.ac.uk/id/eprint/13431>

Disclaimer

The University of Gloucestershire has obtained warranties from all depositors as to their title in the material deposited and as to their right to deposit such material.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation or warranties of commercial utility, title, or fitness for a particular purpose or any other warranty, express or implied in respect of any material deposited.

The University of Gloucestershire makes no representation that the use of the materials will not infringe any patent, copyright, trademark or other property or proprietary rights.

The University of Gloucestershire accepts no liability for any infringement of intellectual property rights in any material deposited but will remove such material from public view pending investigation in the event of an allegation of any such infringement.

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR TEXT.

The Hybrid Reformation: A Social, Cultural, and Intellectual History of Contending Forces by Christopher Ocker, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022, 350pp, £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781108477970

Deep-seated intellectual problems lie at the root of explaining religious change in the sixteenth century. The idea of *reformatio* denoted a return to an original, pristine order. It was about recovering a partly forgotten set of truths; it was never about proclaiming a new set of ideas. For the early Reformation, moreover, it is difficult to speak of distinct confessions—Lutheran, Calvinist and Counter-Reformation Catholicism—when these were only just being formed. Not until different parties engaged in more concerted institution building did a clear confessional culture take shape. How then do we explain religious change, if different protagonists never saw themselves as moving to a new and different position? How do we speak of choice in the adoption of different religious confessions, when, for the early part of the Reformation, such a direct choice was not easily or readily articulated? After all, if there was any common question or endeavour, it was not about the formation of new confessions but about the renewal of Christian life in Europe.

Christopher Ocker's *The Hybrid Reformation* seeks an answer by applying the notion of hybridity and the idea of 'third forces'. Here Ocker draws upon the work of the Austrian medievalist Friedrich Heer, who spoke of a "third force" [which] consisted of intellectuals fatigued by religious zeal. The third force was triangulated ... not merely against catholic and protestant confessions, but against "the threatening split" of Christendom (246). Ocker extends such a notion to include deep ambivalence and ambiguity through an exploration of a series of case studies involving not only intellectual, but social and cultural change. The interaction of these 'third forces', for Ocker, leads us to hybridity. Reformation change was not the product of two binary and opposing catholic and protestant forces, but emerged from an interaction with 'third forces'. The result was a confessional world loaded with ambiguity, which defies the hard and fast definitional categories we tend to apply. In taking such a position, Ocker moves us another step away from the traditional narrative of protestants rejecting medieval Catholicism.

In seeking to address 'third forces', Ocker, in part 1, speaks of the 'Indifference and Ambiguity' (1) involved in the different choices made. In addressing the disputes which arose when nuns in Nuremberg decided to adopt the "new" faith, property, namely material wealth, became the defining point of dispute where indifference in the "new" religious debates pervaded. In the case of Anna Hirschvogel who decided to leave the convent, her sister's concern was to deny Anna's right to property, which Anna had seceded when she became a nun. For Anna the decision to change her religious position was defined by her desire to gain a share of her inheritance and live her life differently by marrying Sebastian Winß. She may have become a protestant heroine, but the Reformation gave space for material and personal fulfilment, which

could now be negotiated, as opposed to providing an impulse for a specific form of spiritual renewal (39-40).

It is with the example of Ruprecht von Mosheim, however, that an idea of 'third forces' really comes to the fore. Mosheim was a catholic clergyman, who was at the centre of imperial politics, because of his close association with the House of Austria. Mosheim adopted the position of a 'middleman', deploring Luther's hard distinction between the law and the Gospel, but also criticizing the corruption of the catholic clergy (44-6). Working from a more spiritualist position, Mosheim sought to reconcile and heal Christendom. Such an example underlines how all of those engaged in religious dispute and discussion were part of an ongoing heterodox discussion. The difference with the Reformation was that such heterodox discussion, for some parties, would clarify into more distinct and opposing orthodoxies.

Such a set of observations, concerning the ambivalent and ambiguous responses of those who cannot be easily categorized within an emerging catholic or protestant dichotomy, leads naturally into part 2 on 'Medieval Protestants' (65). Ocker makes reference to Heiko Oberman's seminal intervention *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) and the now established rejection of confessional employment as found in the earlier work of figures such as Troeltsch, which saw the Reformation as a clear break with the old.

The case of Ockham's nominalism and his connection with Luther is directly tackled. Nominalism writ large, within wider historiography, has been taken to represent a rejection of the view of universals in metaphysics as found in the realism of Aquinas. Instead of seeing universals as having a self-sustaining existence as realists did, nominalists took the position that '*any* such general terms *only ever* referred to names' (101). Hence nominalism has been viewed as a step towards Leibniz and empiricism, because in seeing universals as dead, the scientific method became the basis for constructing knowledge (102).

As Ocker points out, nominalism was not the revolutionary position we might think. Ockham took a more restrictive view. He did not question universals so radically. Instead, Ockham argued that 'many "common" or general terms referred only to attributes of things, rather than to "universal" entities that existed prior to the particular object' (101). Radicalism was not to be found in such a position, because it did not challenge, so fundamentally, the position of universals and a medieval theology which allowed us to access grace through the sacraments. In other words, it was not a direct precursor to Luther's articulation of the need for faith alone. After all, Wycliffe and Hus were in fact realists (129). What drew these different figures together was more a style of argument, terminism, which allowed for careful and challenging scrutiny of ideas and positions. Here Luther emerges as a complex figure, whose use of Ockham did not preclude him from a wider engagement with scholastic logic. In fact, a realist-nominalist dichotomy is seen as emerging from polemical exchanges within the late medieval world, which overshadows the eclectic

nature of medieval scholasticism. In these terms, Luther's thought becomes hybrid in nature, as opposed sitting firmly within one camp (153).

Part III 'Interpretation beyond borders' (155) continues the deconstruction of confessional emplotment and of a Reformation defined by protestants breaking with a medieval catholic world. Scholars no longer tend to think of a hard and fast line between humanism and scholasticism. The classic example of a Christian humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam, appears a more ambivalent figure. He both used scholastic techniques when drawing upon them to substantiate his search for a greater purity in Christian living and rejected a scholastic approach when he thought, for example, Luther was quibbling over irrelevant matters (176-7).

Similarly, an ambivalence emerges in a reformed protestant approach to breaking open the meaning of God's word. Instead of focusing on Reformation polemic and the quintessential idea that Calvin was engaged in a more literal, humanist reading of scripture, Ocker turns to the continued and persistent presence of an allegorical reading of scripture, which drew upon allusions and parallels as a way of breaking open the biblical text. Such a free and vibrant style of reading did not die with the Reformation. Sebastian Castellio may have become one of Calvin's *bêtes noires* because of his advocacy of toleration; but in an early dispute the problem was not Castellio's use of an allegorical reading, which was accepted practice, but the conclusions he reached using allegory, which fuelled Calvin's hostility (205). An allegorical reading also became problematic, when spiritualist groups, those more radical offshoots of Protestantism, awkwardly skirted the boundaries of Calvinist orthodoxy (209-17). The boundaries of interpretation remained fraught with allegory. A direct reading of scripture did not emerge as the point where resolution of differences in interpretation could be easily sought.

A picture emerges, then, of a continuing heterodox and hybrid world, with each actor or group defying easy categorization within the boundaries of a defined confessional culture. What the question of hybridity captures is the reality of religious change prior to confessionalization. In this respect, though, the identification of 'third forces', which sit between the clearly defined poles of protestant reformers and their counter-reformation opponents, seems slightly contrived. Is the hybridity which is discussed not simply an acknowledgement that prior to the process of confessionalization and institutional building, European Christianity had a plurality and a certain heterodoxy? Perhaps the more important question is: when did it become apparent that a certain accepted heterodoxy had been reshaped into a more binary protestant and catholic world?

Ocker's nuanced reading of social, cultural and intellectual exchanges in Europe, mainly concerning the German speaking lands, Geneva and the Netherlands, does capture the sensibility of religious exchanges and choice which preceded the emergence of a confessionally bounded Europe. He stresses the absence of clear lines and a pervading sense of ambivalence. Nevertheless, a question does remain unanswered: why did such a heterodox world in the end give way to ostensible

confessional orthodoxies? Perhaps it is to a nominalist frame of analysis which Ocker's work points. Once an accusation was made, or a label was applied, a heterodox culture was suddenly viewed through a new category. If the lines remain blurred, and the positions taken were by nature hybrid, is it the case that when Reformation polemic was applied the variations in different hybrid positions became categorized within a binary framework nevertheless?